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Can China Curb Trump’s Gambit in Hormuz?

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*China’s shock warning to the US **President Donald Trump** that his road to Beijing goes through the Strait of Hormuz has been an audacious move directly linking his planned visit to China on May 14-15 with the situation around Iran.*

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□□, Farsi, Hebrew, Español, عربـــــــــــي, Русский, Portugues, Français, Deutsch, Italiano, □□□, □□□, Türkçe, Српски. And 40 more languages.

It is more than coincidental that China’s whiplash in the form of a special press conference to mark the commencement of China’s presidency of the Security Council on May 1 at the UN in New York by its special representative **Ambassador Fu Cong** came hot on the heels of Russian **President Vladimir Putin** telephoning Trump on April 28 to warn him that

> “if the United States and Israel resume military action, this would inevitably lead to extremely adverse consequences not only for Iran and its neighbours, but for the entire international community… a ground operation on Iranian territory would be particularly unacceptable and dangerous.”

Ambassador Fu, reading out a written statement, explicitly stated that the US blockade against Iran must be lifted and that the root cause of the crisis lies in the “unjust” attacks by the US and its allies on Iran.

Ambassador Fu warned that if the Strait of Hormuz is still in crisis when Air Force One lands in Beijing, it will be on top of the agenda, despite the reality that China-US relationship goes far beyond the current crisis, as the continued closure of the world’s most vital chokepoint has become an unavoidable priority.

As the world’s largest oil importer with 40 percent of its crude passing through the Strait, China views the restoration of navigation as an urgent matter of national and global interest. In Fu’s perspective, the responsibility for reopening the Strait lies with both sides. He called for a synchronised deescalation — Iran should lift its restrictions and the US should lift its retaliatory blockade.

The ambassador expressed particular alarm over the current rhetoric from Washington suggesting that the ceasefire is only temporary and urged the international community to voice opposition to the resumption of kinetic operations.

Fu's choice of words linking the Hormuz crisis with Trump's China visit is noteworthy:

> "I am sure if the Hormuz is still closed by the time President goes to China, this issue will be high on the agenda of the bilateral talks. And of course the bilateral relationship between China and the US goes far beyond the Strait of Hormuz. And I think it is in the interest of both countries, the two peoples — and I should say the entire peoples of the world — desire that China and the US maintain steady, sound and sustainable relations."

Interestingly, the Ambassador seized the opportunity to categorically deny any military collaboration between China and Iran during the war.

> "But we are very sympathetic towards what the Iranian people are enduring. An illegitimate war has been imposed on the people…"

Make no mistake that China and Russia have signalled the emergence of an alternate narrative on the international stage — one that portrays the US as the destabilising force in the Persian Gulf. Between the two superpowers, China has taken a much stronger position linking the resolution of the Hormuz blockade with the Sino-American strategic discourses.

Significantly, three days after Fu spoke in New York, Beijing took a decisive step against the US by ordering Chinese refineries across the country to defy the Trump administration's sanctions on Iranian oil. Action speaks better than words. This is the first time a country has poked the Trump administration in the eye, marking a new level of defiance that may be a precursor to the shape of things to come. (See my blog *Beijing confronts US sanctions on refineries*, Indian Punchline, May 4, 2026)

That said, on closer examination, it would have weighed in Beijing's calculus that China also has a profound and consequential relationship with the GCC states that is more dynamic than what Iran is offering. Fu prudently took to the heights and refused to be judgemental about Iran's entanglement with the petrodollar states of the Persian Gulf.

On the other hand, it is a big thing in itself to warn a megalomaniacal politician like Trump and being publicly notified that Beijing invitation to him for a state visit comes with strings attached. Already, **President Xi Jinping** is reportedly balancing his invite to Trump with another one likewise to Putin in the month of May itself.

One can never be sure about the Chinese motivation to publicly set the tone for Trump's arrival in Beijing ten days from now. Actually, embedded deep inside Ambassador Fu's lengthy statement was a cryptic remark in parenthesis to the effect 'if the visit (by Trump) takes place.' Could it be that Beijing would have preferred Trump's state visit to be deferred to a future date in calmer circumstances?

The fact of the matter is that Trump has three options — first of all, a return to war, but that is not only deeply unpopular internally but also requires a redefinition of necessity as well as definite prospects of success; two, moving toward negotiation, but then, Tehran seeks a fundamental change in the negotiation framework, which would essentially require a retreat

by Trump from his “maximum pressure” policy.

There is a third option possibly, which is to continue the present “siege warfare.” It is less costly but is fraught with the risk of becoming a protracted debilitating strategic trap where the decisive factor is resilience. This is also where the shift in global pressure can be a critical factor. The US stands isolated today as a permanent member of the Security Council.

Trump is highly sensitive about criticism. He hit back at Putin with a rare public rebuff apropos the latter’s offer to mediate by advising him in an acerbic tone to concentrate on the war in Ukraine. Fu, on the other hand, has written on a clean state, factoring in the grim geo-strategic reality this may be the last chance for the Trump-Netanyahu axis to have another “go” at Iran’s destruction and disintegration.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps [IRGC] stated on Monday,

> “No commercial or tanker vessels has transited the Strait of Hormuz in the past several hours. US officials’ claims are baseless and outright false.”

As Tehran sees it, Trump’s decision to launch the so-called Project Freedom in the Strait of Hormuz — ostensibly to “assist neutral vessels” and ensure their safe passage — is not just a security operation but is a multi-layered political-military move, an effort to redefine the rules of the game in the Strait of Hormuz and to seize the initiative in one of the world’s most sensitive geopolitical points.

The IRGC statement stressed that any US military presence in the Hormuz Strait will be met with military force, since this is a blatant attempt to alter the status quo, continue the 40-day war, and effectively violate the ceasefire.

There is no question that IRGC will bring to bear on the developing security situation its deterrent capability at some point sooner rather than later to prevent the entrenchment of a US military presence near Iran’s maritime borders — as well as to send a message to markets and economic actors worldwide that safe transit through the Strait will remain contingent on engagement with Iran’s declared rules.

This dialectic raises the level of risk for all parties. The signs of a dangerous drift toward “kinetic phase” are already appearing in the Strait Hormuz.

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Featured image: Iran’s high-speed patrol boats in ‘asymmetrical’ naval war in Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf (File photo / Indian Punchline)

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